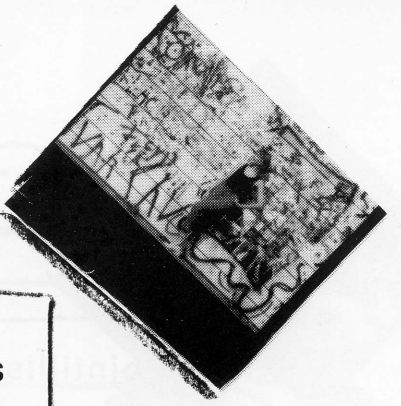


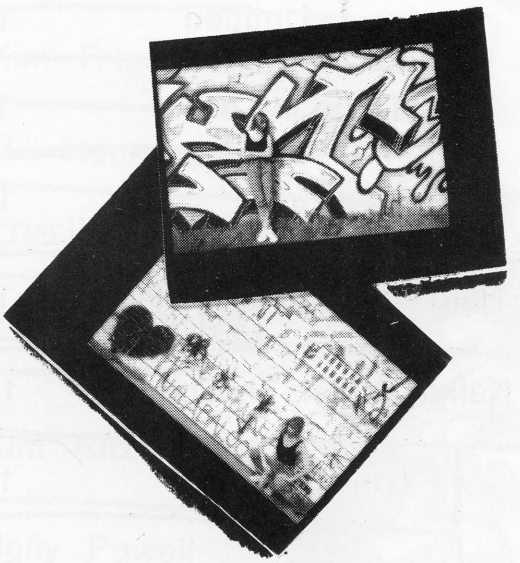
FORCES



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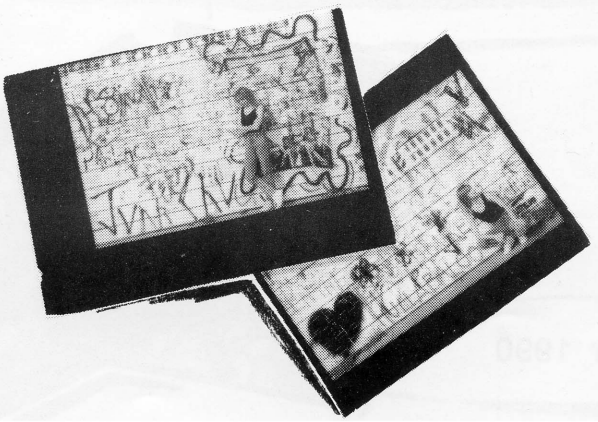
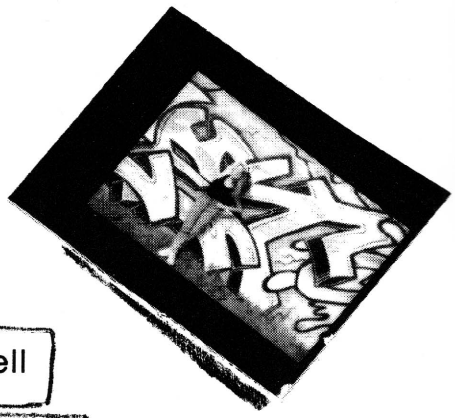
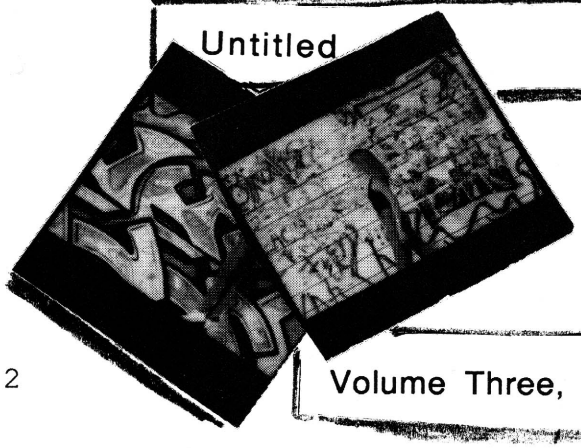


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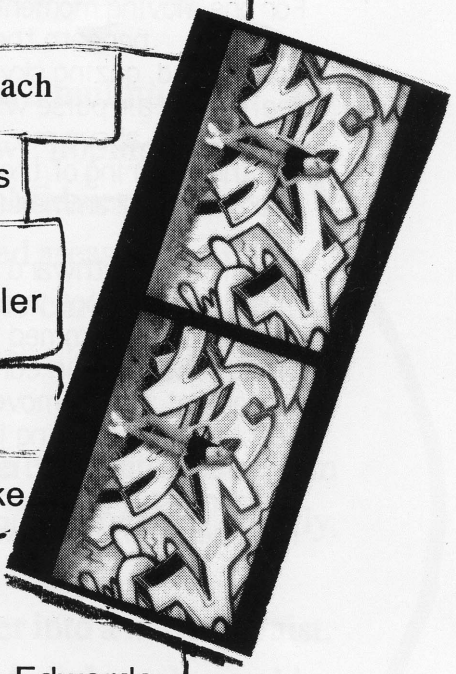
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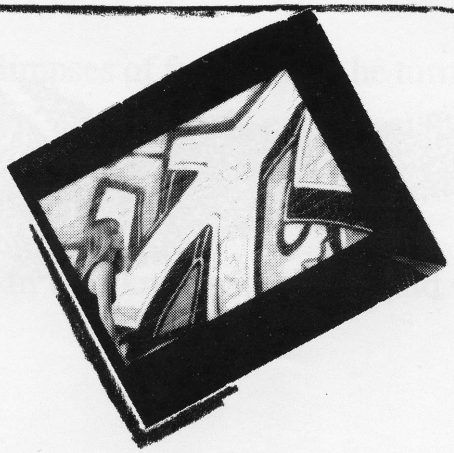




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Betty Correll

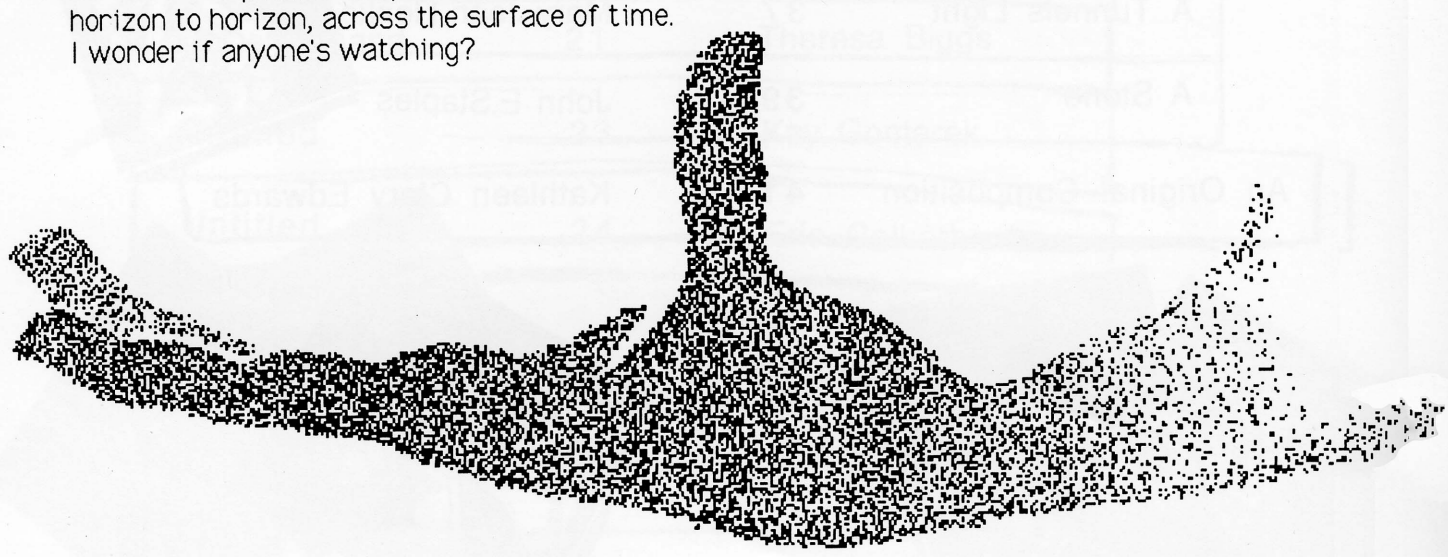
Pointillism

It's spring, and the black flocks of grackles are
passing through.

They fly in a sweeping, swirling, rapid current,
horizon to horizon across the sky.
Eddying currents surge within the flow,
currents within currents,
movement within movement,
in a fast-flowing rhythmic pointillism.

For one moving moment I stand on a spot of ground
beneath them,
earthbound, gazing skyward, watching,
feeling the air pulse with the sound of life flying
above me
and the whirring of thousands of wings
in a vast programmed flow.

Then I look earthward and resume my daily pace,
myself a tiny spot in a duller, pedestrian flow,
a human, programmed flow
of currents within currents,
movement within movement,
veering and sweeping in a vaster, slow-motioned
pointillism,
horizon to horizon, across the surface of time.
I wonder if anyone's watching?



Theresa Biggs

Spirit of '76 at 54

Bodies glistening with desire pulsate to the bass fertility drums. Golden idols inlaid with precious and semiprecious stones adorn their limbs while elaborate ceremonial gowns and robes form a swirling kaleidoscope of colors. Occasionally, a young woman is lifted above the mass as if in sacrifice to the gods, longlegged and bare breasted, head thrown back in abandonment, only to be welcomed back into the ocean of humanity below. Is this the decadence Moses saw on his descent from the Mount? It's another Saturday night at Studio 54.

Dom Perignon flows, silver spoons appear and disappear into a multitude of Halstons, Calvins and St. Laurents. High-cheekboned women prowl, hoping to be discovered. Young men rub against other men, as well as their Midwest morals, searching for a break. Surrounding the dance floor are dark, cushioned areas where the ballet "Favors" is constantly being choreographed and revised. The curious, the lonely, select tourists, youthful adventurers all blend to make one of America's most notorious nighclubs.

Amidst this flashing background I find my attention drawn to an exquisite young man in his twenties. He appears as if he stepped out of the glossy pages of Gentlemen's Quarterly, except there's no questioning his masculinity.

He stands head and shoulders above me. Broad shoulders taper into a narrow waist. Long legs meet at trim buttocks, snugly hugged by Jordache. Surely Michelangelo would have chiseled his symmetry.

Flashing colored lights give me teasing glimpses of face, and as he turns toward me I am jolted. The electricity is tangible. Brown, almost black, eyes meet mine. I see approval subtly register in his glance as he scans my body. His eyes leave me and continue to survey the rest of the crowd.

His presence is incongruous. Here is a man who knows who he is and what

he wants. It is inconceivable to imagine him allowing himself to be bartered over like fresh meat in a butcher shop. In this sea of lemmings, he is a lion. Men and women alike are drawn to him, so many followers who sense a leader.

With amusement he toys with his admirers, tolerating the men, somewhat receptive of the women. Occasionally, he allows himself a smile. He possesses the smile of a five-year-old boy; the display of innocence is surprising. A man, a boy--women's hearts overflow with maternal instinct. Here is a Herculean man who seems to need to be mothered, a fantasy so many women harbor deep in the recesses of their sexuality.

Men and women pass business cards to him. He turns down offers, chances that the others hope for, with a sarcastic smile. He deplores the "Beautiful People."

The attraction grows. Men and women alike strut before him, preening themselves like so many peacocks. Eventually he chooses one of the most beautiful of the women. They begin to dance.

He is liquid, completing the music, so aware of his body yet so comfortable. His partner ceases to exist. He has taken an imaginary lover. Eyes half shut, hebegins to sweat. Slowly he opens his shirt and lets it slip to the floor. He knows that he is being adored. He laughs at his admirers; he has no respect for their weakness.

The dance ends. His shirt seems to magically appear and he carelessly flings it over one shoulder. Walking through the crowd he acknowledges the many compliments with a nod, a smile. Occasionally he reaches out and playfully touches a particularly lovely woman on the nose, gracing her with the full impact of his childlike smile.

People move aside as he makes his way to the door. I realize he is leaving and try to follow. I am fascinated and long for more clues to his identity. I make my way outside breathlessly. Cabbies wait for passengers, a bag lady scuffles by asking for change, my breath forms white clouds in the cold wet air, and he is nowhere in sight. As quickly as he arrived, he disappears without a trace.

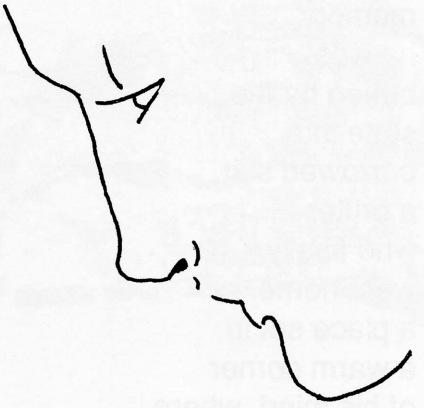
Once again I join the people inside. The heat of the club assaults me, and I pause, trying to catch my breath. My eyes scan the crowd, the users, the puppets, the people who are lost, looking for themselves and each other, never satisfied, living a glossy, superficial existence.

So strange to have seen a man of such strength in a place of such weakness. A line from a movie keeps running through my head, ". . . he allows himself to be adored, but never loved."

I begin to dance.

Eric Colbath

drunken piano staggers
through the dirty red
lounge, and collapses.
a drink disappears
like the rest of the
room in a
long stare at
the row of dying
bottles behind
the bar.
the tender slips
into the back
with the rattling
cash drawer,
and the player
shoulders his
coat, pockets
his tips, and
fades into
the shadow of
the door.
his ears ring
in harmony with
the neon signs
hum, and the
ticking of the
whiskey clock.
alone, he sinks
in the warmth
of this faded
dive, thirsting
for one
more swallow,
as everything
goes abstract.
stepping out
into the spinning
stars, his
breath rises
white in the
cool glow of the
empty gravel-lots'



overhead lamp.
fumbles for the
keys of a car
that is not there,
and turns, buttoning
up his thin jacket.
he heads toward
the river, down
a path that leads
to a bridge. in the
early pre-dawn
hours, the rhythm
of a diesel barge motor
whispers, and he settles
down. never comfortable
in a home he never had,
he drifts, thinking only
of the past; no present,
no future. he closes his
eyes under the silent
steel spans, and
brings up a long
satisfying grin.
frozen in time,
the grin was still
there when he
was found a
week later. it was
the typically cold
weather, and the
alcohol that saved
the expression
of his fondest
memory.
he was
buried by the
state in a
borrowed suit,
a drifter
who finally
went home.
a place set in
a warm corner
of his mind, where
he visited in smiling silence.

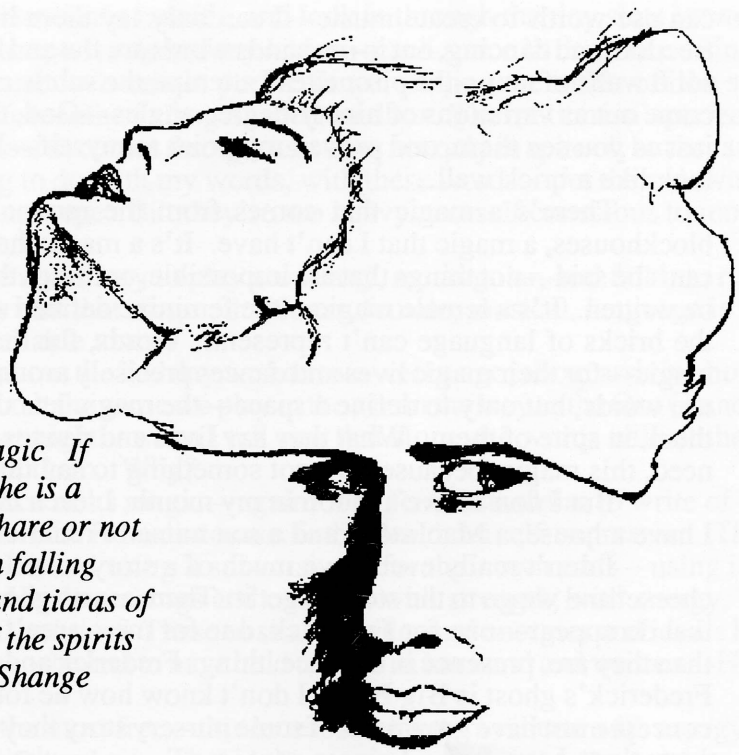


Eric Colbath



Matthew K. Brown

To be in Love with the Fear of Falling



Where there is woman there is magic If there is a moon falling from her mouth, she is a woman who knows her magic, who can share or not share her powers A woman with a moon falling from her mouth, roses between her legs and tiaras of Spanish moss, this woman is a consort of the spirits
—Ntosake Shange

As I write this, I look at her letter—her letter's letters. Hand-written, they look like dark dancing figures on the page—a writing of bodies. I breathe, look up. My letters sit on straight lines on a screen before me; the only life they had was the click that sent them spiraling towards their places in static rows on the screen. They stand patiently in line and refuse to dance. I pick up a pen to try to write living letters like hers, like theirs, to write bodies that can sing and dance and live—but living words must be born, and I can't do that. I put the pen away, the pad of paper, and I type. I want to write bodies—and words come out—I need to be in that magic language, to let it come through me. It speaks what can't be spoken and puts into words what can't be. I've got to say something to you that I can't say—the words come from keys that don't exist on my keyboard—God, it makes my hands shake, my fingers keep reaching for those keys that aren't there.

I've begun again, again trying to tell this story—this small story in which so little happens, so little is said despite all of the words—and I've confused you already The narrative is first-person—who I am will be cleared up later, as will the identity of the writer of the letter I've mentioned, and Frederick—this is all fairly straight forward. You're confused because you don't know who you are. I've drawn you into the story by my writing of that word, but as yet, you could be anyone. a friend, a fish in Frederick's tank, my journal, my lover—you could even be dead—or gone. This isn't an ambiguity that I want. Your part, your role in this, is reader—the character that you play is the person who will turn this page like a page of a found note—please be comfortable in this, I've got to tell you something, something that I can't say

I hear a new language being spoken now; I read it, I lose my self and feel it swept up in a lunar flow—carried sometimes, knocked over sometimes; sometimes just left behind. They've[1] got the moon[2] in their mouths. It lets them sing songs through words and dance in the spaces created by them. With their magic, they

1 Ntozake Shange, Luce Irigaray, Alice Walker Helen Cixous, Zora Neal Hurston, Judith. The Christmas that she was pregnant with Frederick, she gave me Ntozake Shange's Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo. I read it then, but I only saw the magic later.

2 Feminist Literary Theory

can use words to create music—I can only lay them like bricks. I want to make songs, create spaces of freedom and dancing, but in my hands words are flat and heavy, and all I can ever make with them are straight, solid walls of text—the pirouettes I attempt, the subtle changes of direction, of expression that I try to make come out as variations of ninety-degree angles—God, this is ridiculous—I looked up and saw these words just as you see them, and proved my point to myself—I'm trying to write a song even now, and my words look like a brick wall.

There's a magic that comes from the moon: a magic that makes songs of words instead of blockhouses, a magic that I can't have. It's a magic that works beyond words, letting them say things that can't be said—not things that are impossible, or things that aren't real, but things that can't be said, that can't be written. It's a female magic—the feminine defined as that which cannot speak or be spoken, that which the bricks of language can't represent. Words, for those who have the moon, create the space for their magic—for their magic lives and dances precisely around, between and behind the words on the page. They use words, but only to define a space—the magic lets them sing behind the bricks—around them, through them, in spite of them. What they say lives and dances between the static words they write. This is what I need, this magic, because I've got something to say that I can't.

But I don't have a moon in my mouth; I teach English Literature in a suburban community college. I have a house, a MacIntosh and a son named Frederick[3].

I don't really even have much of a story to tell—in it Frederick and I need a box of macaroni and cheese[4] and we go to the store to get it. There are no ghost ships[5], no curses[6] and the two supernatural figures that do appear—one for Frederick, one for me—aren't very mysterious. They're just things that are more than they are, presence in absence, things Frederick and I feel are around all of the time, things we never see. Frederick's ghost is Big Bear. I don't know how he found him; the name came from our supermarket, the concept must have grown out of some nursery story they told him at school. Big Bear is why Frederick sleeps with the light on and why we call the supermarket "Oso Grande" and "Oh, Ghandi." My ghost's name is Judith[7]. She lives in Austin.

3 The personal ad I took out last year read: "SWM (34) who reads, plays cello, and He-Man (with 2 yr-old son) seeks." The one response I got was from the personals editor, apologizing for the printing error that left off the end of my ad. Still, the description seems to hold.

Frederick's ad (we did them together, helping each other)—"I like to hug and play and dance and hear stories at night. You can be my friend if you want, but you've got to bring your own toys. Frederick"—was placed in that section of the personals where they put the fetishists, escorts and the phone sex ads.

He got twelve responses.

4 Frederick and I have an understanding—all bad days have to end with a box of macaroni and cheese—it's just this little closure ritual that we do. Without it the bad days just never seem to go away—they spill over into the next day and the next. We know it's just a ritual, of course, but the therapy is real.

Frederick plinks the macaroni into the pot, stirs them around with his hand until they're perfectly level and then makes a little pool in the center with his index finger for the water. I do the boiling and the straining and then hold Frederick up in front of the fogged window above the sink where he traces our blurry faces on the glass. He adds the margarine and the orange powder to the macaroni and stirs them from the kitchen chair he stands on.

It's not even important that we eat it, but we always do.

5 In addition to my house, my computer and my son, I have 35 three-to-five page papers on "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" to correct before Monday.

I begin to wonder, if I were to write this later in the term, would my allusions be to Moby Dick?—"Call me Frederick," the story begins.

It's a story about Frederick's father's obsession with the elusive memory of the woman who symbolically castrated him.

I wonder.

6 I never bit my arm, never drink blood—instead, I gnaw the insides of my cheeks and press at a small sore in my mouth with my tongue. I admit, more neurotic than dramatic.

I am envious of that hypnotic storytelling power he seems to have, but all I've got to do is tell it once, this story that carries the thing that I can't say, just once and it will be over and I can move on.

7 When she got pregnant, we were going to have the abortion—we both knew we had to. We went to the clinic and everything, through all the counselors, she was even up on the table. She looked so grey and cold in that paper gown. Her eyes were open wide and her hand shook as she squeezed mine:her nails white. I told her that I wouldn't leave; that I was going to stay with her, hold her hand—they let the partners do that. She asked me, softly, to leave, but I said no. I thought she was thinking of me, that she needed me there—I wanted to be strong, help. I talked to her about love for a minute, about how we were both on the table, both wearing paper, would both feel the hurt, and would help each

I can walk around the fence behind my house, on the outside, and look in through the tiny slots between the boards. If I walk quickly enough, I see a kinescope version of my house—each space in the fence a single frame in a short film that pans the back of the house: wisteria in purple flower pulling the trellis off the side of the house, Frederick underneath on the patio in the mouth of a frog-shaped sandbox. The motion isn't perfectly smooth, but the magic, the life that's behind those boards comes through as it does not only in spite of, but because of them. That's what I have to do, what I'm trying to do with my words, with these words—put them down so that they can be read through like the slots in a kinescope. But they're too heavy, too self conscious to move, constantly drawing attention to themselves as boards.

The dancers I create are made of brick, the notes I try to play are heavy, rectangular, and fall into rigid lines. I have to tell you something that I can't say and that magic, that lunar, female, musical, language is the only way I can think of to do that—and it's unavailable to me.

I know that when I begin—when I tell you about the bad day we had two weeks ago; about arriving home from school and finding no macaroni and cheese; about the game we play in the car on the way to the Oso Grande[8], and the insignificant thing that happened there that night—when I tell you that story, the words will sit there, even as these do, and deny my attempts to animate them. Why?

I look at the letter again—look for the source of its magic—again. The feminists claim to write of the body, to appropriate the language that has excluded them from discourse, forbidden them self-expression. They are the oppressed seizing the tool of their oppression and using it subversively for their own ends—using it to speak and make themselves. Where is that here? Her letter sings and crackles with strength, with energy, but where is that coming from? Her body? Her textual politics? These abstract intellectual energies and ideals had to get out of her body and onto this paper somehow—she had to have held the pen in her hand and written—How is she so different from me?

She wrote this at the moment that she felt the most free—this letter, these letters vibrate with energy of liberation, of self appropriation in them—that is their magic. That is the magic I want[9], yet I can't use it.

I'm on the verge of that freedom myself. All I've got to do is tell you this story—this simple little story—

other through it. I remember two tears dropping from my eyes onto her paper gown. She let go of my hand, lifted the blanket, and got up off the table.

In the letter on the desk in front of me, to my left, she tells me that there had never been a time in her life when she felt as alone as she did at that moment on the table when I said those things.

She gave birth to Frederick because she didn't want me to hurt.

She left because this exhausted her

8 It seems that almost everything Frederick and I do is a game—everything that's one of those ritualistic, routine acts that must be done over and over· Laundry is a game with Frederick hiding in piles of dirty towels, undershirts and socks—the uncovered parts get tickled; Cat Box is a game of 'gonna put it on you' with loaded scoopers. In the car on the way to Oso Grande, it's the I've-gotta-go-pee-pee game.

This game began several months ago—we were on the freeway when he said it from his car seat in the back. I began racing through traffic, weaving in and out of cars singing the "gotta go pee-pee, gotta, gotta, gotta, gotta go pee-pee" song and looking back in the mirror with wild eyes. Frederick laughed so hard he wet his pants, his car seat, the back seat and still kept laughing.

So now it's a game. He waits until we're on the way and then "Ive gotta go pee-pee." I sing the song and swerve around and race to the gas station mini-mart. I pull up to a pump, reach into the back seat and sweep him up over my head. I smile at Shary through the window as I run around to the bathroom with Frederick laughing hysterically above my head.

It's not as bothersome as it might seem—it only happens about once or twice a week, and I can usually use a fill up about that often anyway—besides, it's fun for me, too. Frederick and I laugh at the helplessness of our condition as he stands on the edge of the urinal. And he always pees, too—we don't just go through the motions. It's like some kind of conditioned respose: trip to "Oh, Ghandi" = "I've gotta pee."

I don't know how he's able to do that.

9 I fell in love with a woman once—slowly and deeply

It's funny the more I think about how it actually felt—falling in love, I mean—the more I understand why they call it that. At first, I thought they were talking about that initial feeling you get—that little instant on the edge of a pool right after you lose your balance but before you hit the water Your head and your body accept what's going to happen and just give in, let go, and wait to get wet—a kind of peaceful resignation. That's what I used to think.

I know now that they call it falling in love not because it's like falling *into* something like a pool, where you just have that helpless moment for a second and then land and get control again—no, it's more like falling *in* something, in some medium, like air or time. It's like what a skydiver must feel in the air—like having that instant of falling all stretched out for miles, for years. That instant where your heart pumps one beat of dizzy air in your veins, gets pulled and stretched so that it's the falling itself that's the thing—not what you fall into. I think that's the feeling they're talking

for at the end of it I hear something, see something that can change me, free me. I have to tell it to you, though, put it into words, before the act is complete and my liberation is real. All I have to do is say it and it will be real—my words will ring with magic. Until then, I'm trapped—enjoying this weakness, this obsession—knowing that I can be free, but forever putting it off, holding it back,[10] torturing myself with the possibility that there is some way to finesse it—to say it without saying it, to be born without really leaving the womb, trying to keep the clipping of the cord from being too sudden.

Feminist writing. Writing of the body [11] Saying what can't be said.

I read over the pages I have just written and I see that I have been wrong from the start—I can't use this theory, appropriate this magic to tell my story—I can't because it's not a tool to be used. It's not just a means of achieving an end. They are magic, not just magic tricks, and I cannot just pick them up when they suit my needs. I have to say the unsayable; I have to try If I do, if I can, the magic will be there—I can't wait for the effect to shape its means. It doesn't work that way Waiting for that to happen will just keep me falling forever[12] I've got to act—write myself—stop falling—take the ground.[13]

about—those long periods without anything like the ground—at least, that's what it was like for me.

I fell in love with a woman once—her name was Judith.

She left after our son was born. She was exhausted, she said. I took up too much of her, she said, pushed her past the point of moderation—it became an all-or-nothing situation. I didn't know that falling as I was took up so much of her—it seems now that I was not only falling in her, falling in love, but clutching, grabbing, appropriating all I could as I fell.

It's been a long time now, and I do not want her back—I haven't had those thoughts in over a year And yet, there's something that I cling to still—something that I grabbed onto so tightly in my descent that it's almost wrenching to try to let it go. I think it's the feeling of falling itself—it's like if I give that up, I'll finally land and have to gain control again.

Trouble is, I don't know where the Hell I'll land if I ever can break this obsessive grip I have on that feeling. It's scary

10 Like orgasm.

11 Judith and I were working on our Masters at the same time. She tried to explain to me the politics of gender in language one morning at breakfast. I asked her what kinds of sentences had penises, if she could show me one. I really had no grasp of the concept. Even today, now that I've read and loved the theory, I still get it wrong.

She got up from the table, frustrated, furious, and left.

12 Orbit was described to Frederick and me at this year's faculty Halloween party as what happens when you are so far away from the planet that as you fall toward it, it curves out from under you. Basically, if you go out far enough, you can fall forever—always missing the ground by the same distance.

13 One reason Frederick and I shop at Oso Grande is because they have the tall shopping carts. Frederick likes to sit below the basket as we race the other shoppers up and down the aisles and feign crashes into pyramids of pineapple juice or soft-drink display We had gotten our macaroni and cheese and a few other things—I couldn't see him through the wire mesh of the bottom of the basket anymore—and were standing in line. I had to leave him in charge of the basket when I remembered we were out of ketchup.

As I returned, I saw an attractive woman speaking to my basket (Frederick underneath). He'd been pulling skirts again—he meets a lot of women that way

"Where is your Mommy?" I heard her say as I walked up.

"She's gone," he said—his head popped out to one side, he grinned and then went back under cover

"I hope she's coming back soon, or you're going to have to pay for all those groceries."

Frederick's head appeared on the other side of the basket, grinning.

"Nope, she's gone. She's gone."

One reason Frederick and I shop at Oso Grande is because they have the tall shopping carts. Frederick likes to sit below the basket as we race the other shoppers up and down the aisles and feign crashes into pyramids of pineapple juice or soft-drink display We had gotten our macaroni and cheese and a few other things—I couldn't see him through the wire mesh of the bottom of the basket any more—and were standing in line. I had to leave him in charge of the basket when I remembered we were out of ketchup.

As I returned, I saw an attractive woman speaking to my basket (Frederick underneath) He'd been pulling skirts again—he meets a lot of women that way

"Where is your mommy?" I heard her say as I walked up.

"She's gone," he said—his head popped out to one side. He grinned and then went back under cover

"I hope she's coming back soon, or you're going to have to pay for all those groceries."

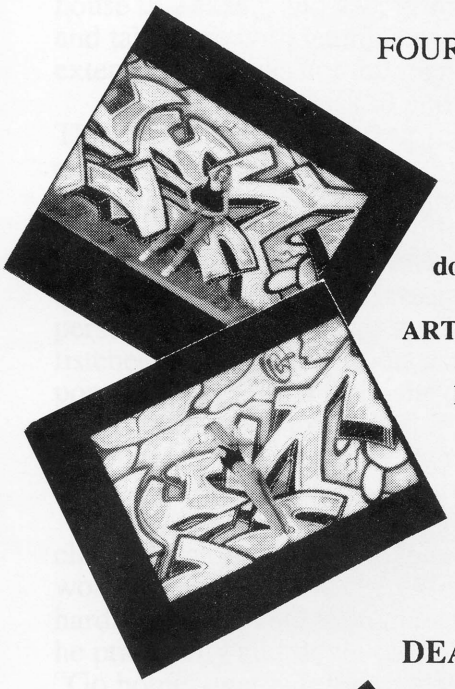
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"Nope, she's gone. She's gone."

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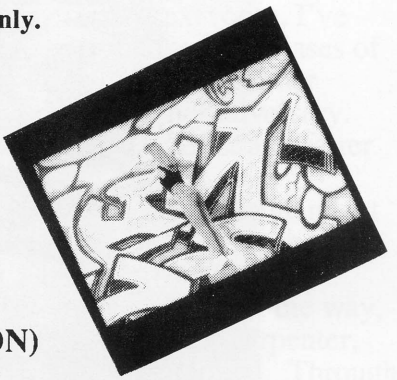
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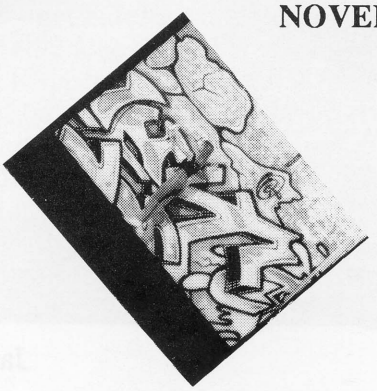
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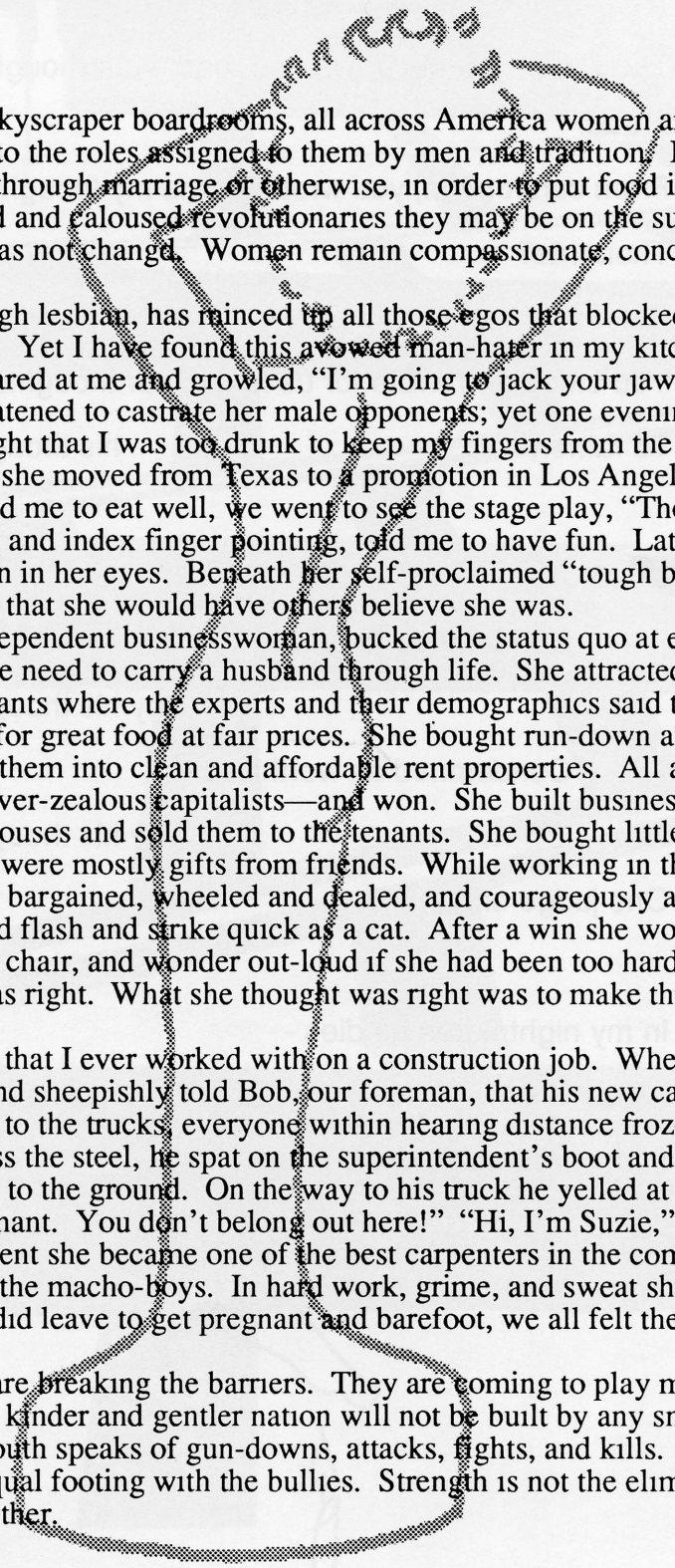




Janet Roberts

Bill Monsees

Hard-nosed and Soft-hearted



From diesel truck cabs to skyscraper boardrooms, all across America women are slashing the harnesses that have kept them reined to the roles assigned to them by men and tradition. No longer must women sell their physical bodies, through marriage or otherwise, in order to put food in their stomachs and roofs over their heads. Hard nosed and caloused revolutionaries they may be on the surface, but underneath the business exterior the biology has not changed. Women remain compassionate, concerned, supportive, and nurturing.

Judy, a firm-jawed and tough lesbian, has minced up all those egos that blocked her assault on the summit of the corporate mountain. Yet I have found this avowed man-hater in my kitchen emptying my last beers down the sink drain. She glared at me and growled, "I'm going to jack your jaw if you don't quit poisoning yourself." She has threatened to castrate her male opponents; yet one evening she unplugged and put aside my power saw; she thought that I was too drunk to keep my fingers from the sawblade's path. The last time I saw her was just before she moved from Texas to a promotion in Los Angeles. That evening she took me out to dinner and reminded me to eat well, we went to see the stage play, "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas," and she, grinning and index finger pointing, told me to have fun. Later, she said good-bye and take-care with genuine concern in her eyes. Beneath her self-proclaimed "tough bitch businesswoman" exterior, Judy was not the monster that she would have others believe she was.

Carol, a successful and independent businesswoman, bucked the status quo at every turn of her life. Though a mother, she never felt the need to carry a husband through life. She attracted money and passed it on. She opened successful restaurants where the experts and their demographics said there were no customers; folks drove from across town for great food at fair prices. She bought run-down and condemned houses in ratty neighborhoods and turned them into clean and affordable rent properties. All across the state she took on politicians, bankers, and over-zealous capitalists—and won. She built businesses and turned them over to employees. She restored houses and sold them to the tenants. She bought little for herself; the few personal possessions that she kept were mostly gifts from friends. While working in the next room, I've listened through open doors as she bargained, wheeled and dealed, and courageously attacked the biases of power brokers. In a fight she could flash and strike quick as a cat. After a win she would kick off her shoes, plop down exhausted in her chair, and wonder out-loud if she had been too hard on her adversary Carol did whatever she thought was right. What she thought was right was to make this a better and fairer world—for everyone.

Susan was the first woman that I ever worked with on a construction job. When the superintendent climbed up onto the bridge deck and sheepishly told Bob, our foreman, that his new carpenter was the woman standing down below next to the trucks, everyone within hearing distance froze. Bob sent his hardhat sailing and bouncing across the steel, he spat on the superintendent's boot and, cursing all the way, he practically slid down the ladder to the ground. On the way to his truck he yelled at our new carpenter, "Go home—get barefoot and pregnant. You don't belong out here!" "Hi, I'm Suzie," she replied. Through all the catcalls, jokes, and harassment she became one of the best carpenters in the company and eventually gained the respect of almost all of the macho-boys. In hard work, grime, and sweat she kept her twinkling eyes and good humor When she did leave to get pregnant and barefoot, we all felt the loss of Susan's hammer and laugh.

Slowly but surely women are breaking the barriers. They are coming to play more and more active roles in all areas of our society A kinder and gentler nation will not be built by any snarley-mouth man who out of the other side of his mouth speaks of gun-downs, attacks, fights, and kills. Peace will come when the carriers of life gain an equal footing with the bullies. Strength is not the elimination of compassion—we are all in this world together.

Bill Monsees

Kafka, Father, Thoughts

Kafka, Father, Thoughts.

The words you never wanted read, your thoughts,

I read

From son for son, you wrote for me my thoughts.

Thoughts?

Fears and tears and pain, —— hardly thoughts.

You stood and wrote for us to him our thoughts,

To father, his thoughts!

Live?

Condemned to guilt -

by his thoughts!

Condemned as worthless -

by his thoughts!

One judge only -

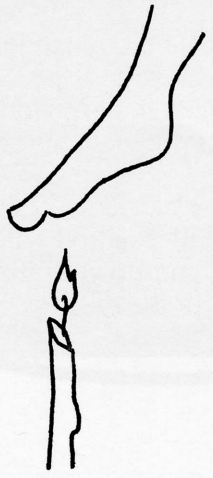
his thoughts!

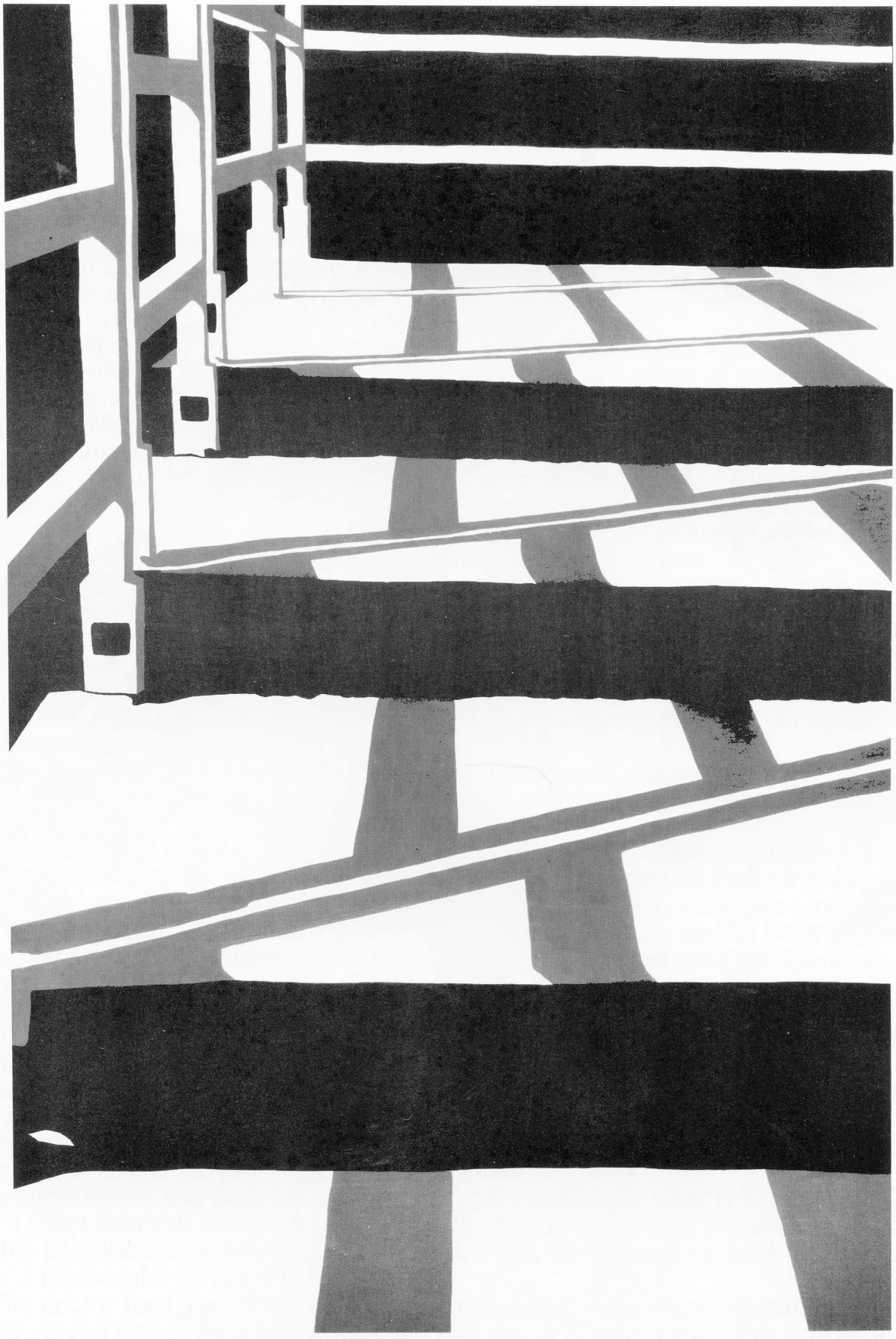
In my nightmares he dies -

correct in his thoughts!

In my dreams I die, cleansed of

his thoughts!





Diane King



Kay Gontarek

Theresa Biggs

McDonaldland

Alone I walk into the lobby of "The Clinic." Pale blue walls seep through my numbness. Mechanically my feet carry me to a window where a smiling young nurse awaits me. I am tempted to put in an order for a Big Mac and fries.

"Please have a seat and fill out these forms."

I confront dozens of stiff, unyielding chairs, allowing the one hiding in the farthest corner to support me. Mindlessly I fill in my name, date, age, week of pregnancy, etc. Pinch me. . . I'm dreaming. I return the forms to the girl with the McDonaldland smile and follow her into the "Group Room."

In an antiseptic, white atmosphere I meet the "Morning Girls." I, too, belong to this dubious club. We are taken care of in the morning as opposed to the "Afternoon Girls" who are taken care of in the afternoon — logical. Ten small chairs are grouped around a larger one. I find incredible irony in the fact that ten adult women are sitting in chairs designed to seat a group of five year olds. I wonder if we're supposed to be cute.

I allow my eyes to wander from one woman to another. We appear to be a small cross section of the country. Various races, sizes, ages, and classes are represented. In amazement I hear one very tired looking woman confess that this was her third time. She has five at home.

I remain mute. This isn't happening. Another smiling nurse from McDonaldland enters and sits at the only adult chair in the room. I am vaguely aware of her words, charts, smiles, laughter, more words, smiles . . . and she's gone.

We are all herded into another room and handed paper robes and slippers. I never did find where the Golden Arches were monogrammed, and the slippers never lasted through one night of dancing.

A nurse strolls in carrying a tray of nine small paper cups, each containing one pill. A pill that will obliterate the pain, stop us from caring, surrendering us both physically and emotionally. Anxiously I wait for mine. She approaches me last, with nine empty cups.

"I'm sorry dear, as you know you're allergic to most drugs, and its been impossible to find a substitute you will tolerate. You may back out or go ahead with the operation. You are eleven weeks along though, and after twelve it gets complicated. So if you'll . . ."

I feel myself detach from this body that's causing me so much trouble. I am watching myself from above, observing this soap opera; we are separate.

How sad and scared I look. The "Morning Girls" are quiet now and have begun to leave the room one at a time on a gurney. I see them help me onto the bed on wheels. I follow, curiously. Another room, very dim, very quiet, empty and cold envelops me. The only furnishing is a table with stirrups upon which they lay me, and a smaller table filled with various tools and varying widths of metal tubes.

A nurse enters and I see her speak to me, but I can't hear what is being said. She spreads a sheet over my lap, places my feet in the stirrups and helps me shift into the most vulnerable position ever conceived. Nauseated, I wait for the next visitor knowing it won't be Ronald McDonald yet praying it will be.

The doctor finally marches into the room, nodding to the nurse; he barely acknowledges my spread legs. I hear him inform me that due to circumstances this will be an un-

comfortable experience and if I should move or utter a sound he will stop the procedure and leave the "little problem" to me

McDonaldland vanishes; my mind and body slam together The first metal tube, as thin as pencil lead, is inserted into my cervix The pain is sudden, shocking This is replaced by a second, a third, then a fourth, each tube larger than the last, forcing me open, violating me The pain increases with white hot intensity.

The nurse takes my hand and tells me to push, to squeeze I share my pain with her, allow her to carry some of my burden. She winces under the pressure from my grip The blood rushes through my body; I cannot hear anymore. The loudness of my heart beating, the sound of blood coursing through my veins hurts my hears

Gentleness has become a word with no meaning. Another object enters me I watch the nurse's mouth vacuum . . . I read her lips. This metal snake tears into me, twisting and turning, sucking away the child, this child of violence.

My organs scream out in rebellion, "Stop! Stop!" I remain silent, cold sweat pouring off my body. I don't think I can stand it any longer. I'm losing my sight, consciousness is slipping from me

Abruptly my body is left alone. The doctor is gone. The nurse is trying to help me to my feet. My muscles have rebelled against this act I perpetrated on my body and they refuse to carry me. I am lifted onto the gurney like a child.

The recuperating room is sunny and bright. Most of the "Morning Girls" are smiling, getting dressed and gossiping around a table heavy with milk and cookies I lay on one of the beds, curled in the fetal position, trying to ignore the pain. I envy their drug induced state and am angered at the injustice of mine.

"Help me! I need something for the pain! Please help me!"

Someone's screaming; I realize it's me A nurse bustles over, then two. They whisper, "What can we do?" There is nothing they can do. I fall into a troubled sleep, dancing in and out of consciousness.

It's time to leave, my ride is here. I am helped into a bathroom and left with a pile of my clothes, a sanitary napkin, and shaking knees. I jump, startled by my own reflection in the mirror. I am reminded of the photos of the Appalachian coal miners' wives The same blank stare, ashen white skin, desperate and numb; I barely recognize this face. I dress. My hands caress my belly as if to comfort.

I am ushered through McDonaldland one last time. I pass the "Group Room" now filled with the "Afternoon Girls" and my heart feels as if it might burst in sympathy One of the girls is no older than thirteen.

The lobby is now filled, filled with men. These men were so much a part of today's events, yet will never know, never feel their loss in this particular way Our loss was not only emotional but physical as well. All eyes turn to me as I enter the room. I lower my eyes. I want to hide. I feel these men searching my face, trying to find some clue as to the mystery their women were experiencing I refuse to give away the secret.

I leave McDonaldland letting the door close heavily behind me The sun is shining. There is a playground across the street that I never noticed. It is filled with children . .I never noticed before how many children! They play, swing from monkey bars, throw balls to one another. The children are laughing, high musical giggles, unrestrained, their whole bodies joining in their merriment.

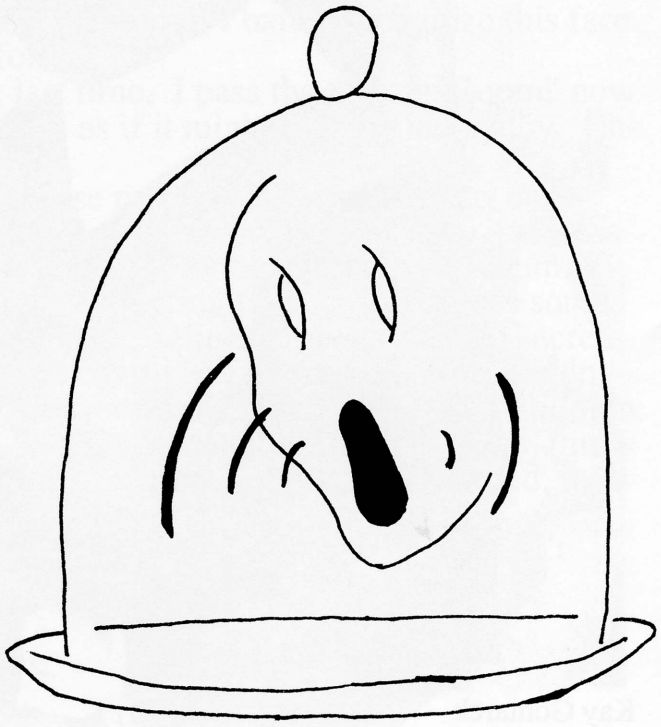
I take a deep breath, tilt my head back so the tears pool up in my eyes I can't allow them to fall. No one cries in McDonaldland.

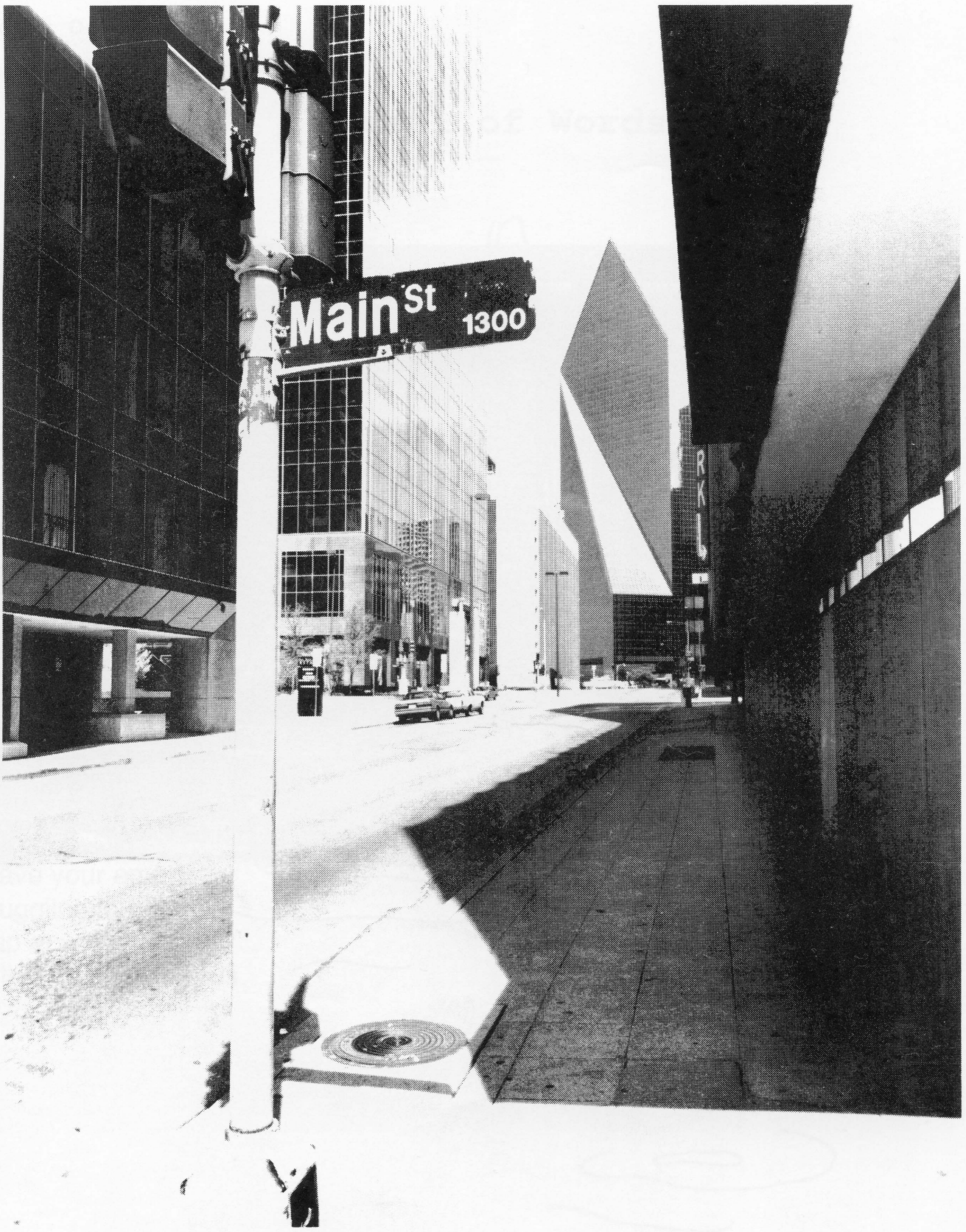


Kay Gontarek

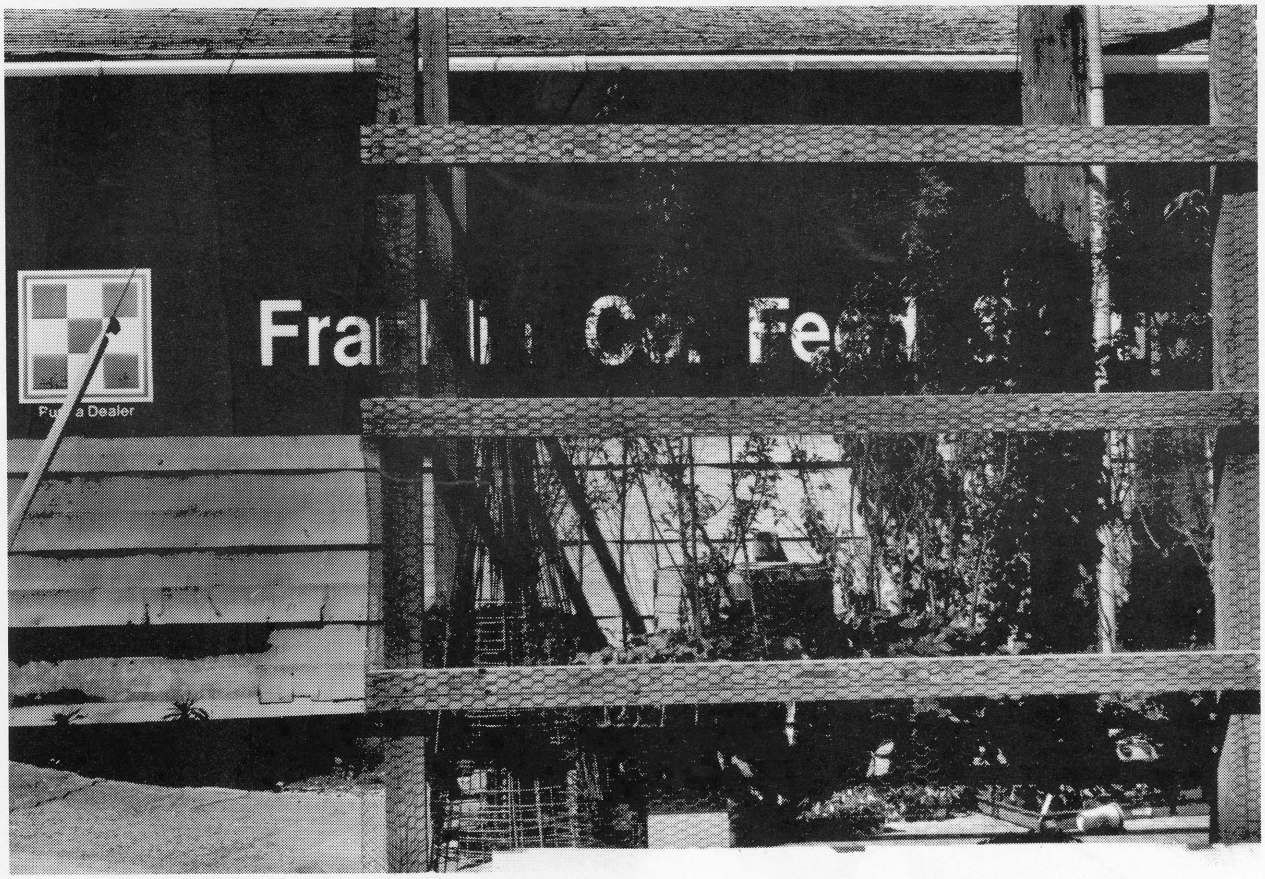
Eric Colbath

the worm that shoots
through the dirty world,
the bullet that
plows through a
simple mind,
the pain that
rots in the darkest
corners,
blood on the lenses
that make me blind.
a silhouette in
the void of night.
a shadow beyond
the proof of doubt,
a presence felt
like any other,
its hand on my
mouth so I do not shout.





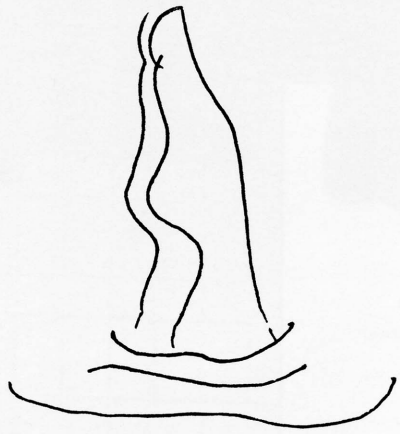
Eric Colbath



Susan Clasby

Violet O'Brien

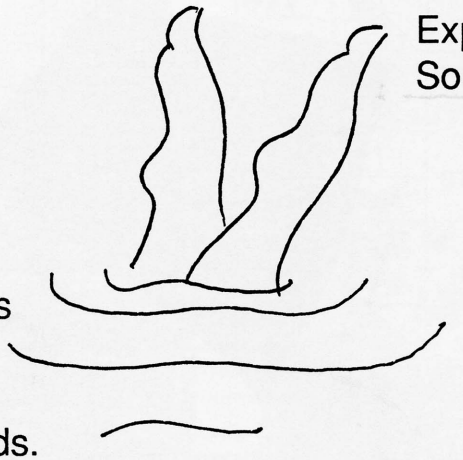
Chisel of Words



Talking to you

You're listening
our eyes are locked
You care
You answer back

Your hands are busy
Mine are busy, too
I'm on an adventure
Exploring
Something is happening

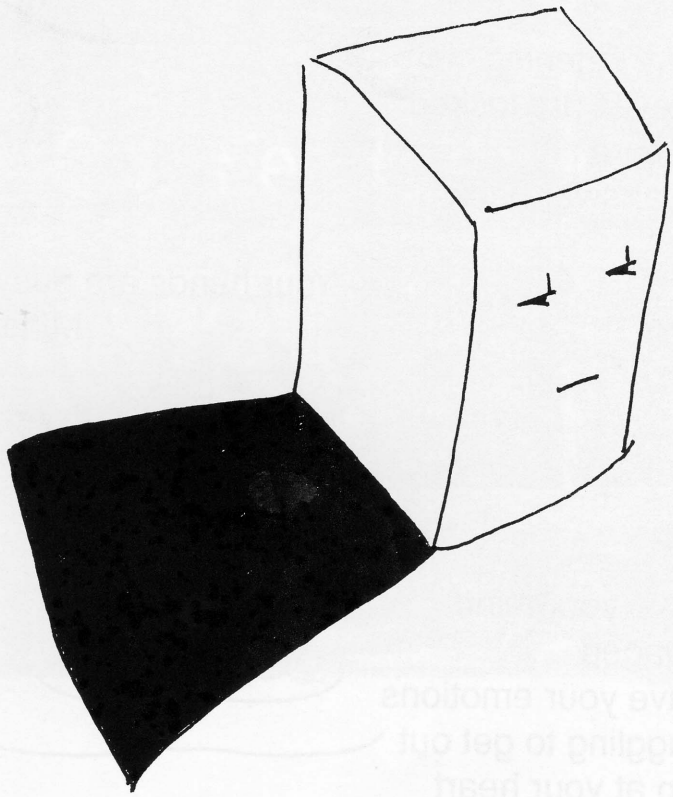


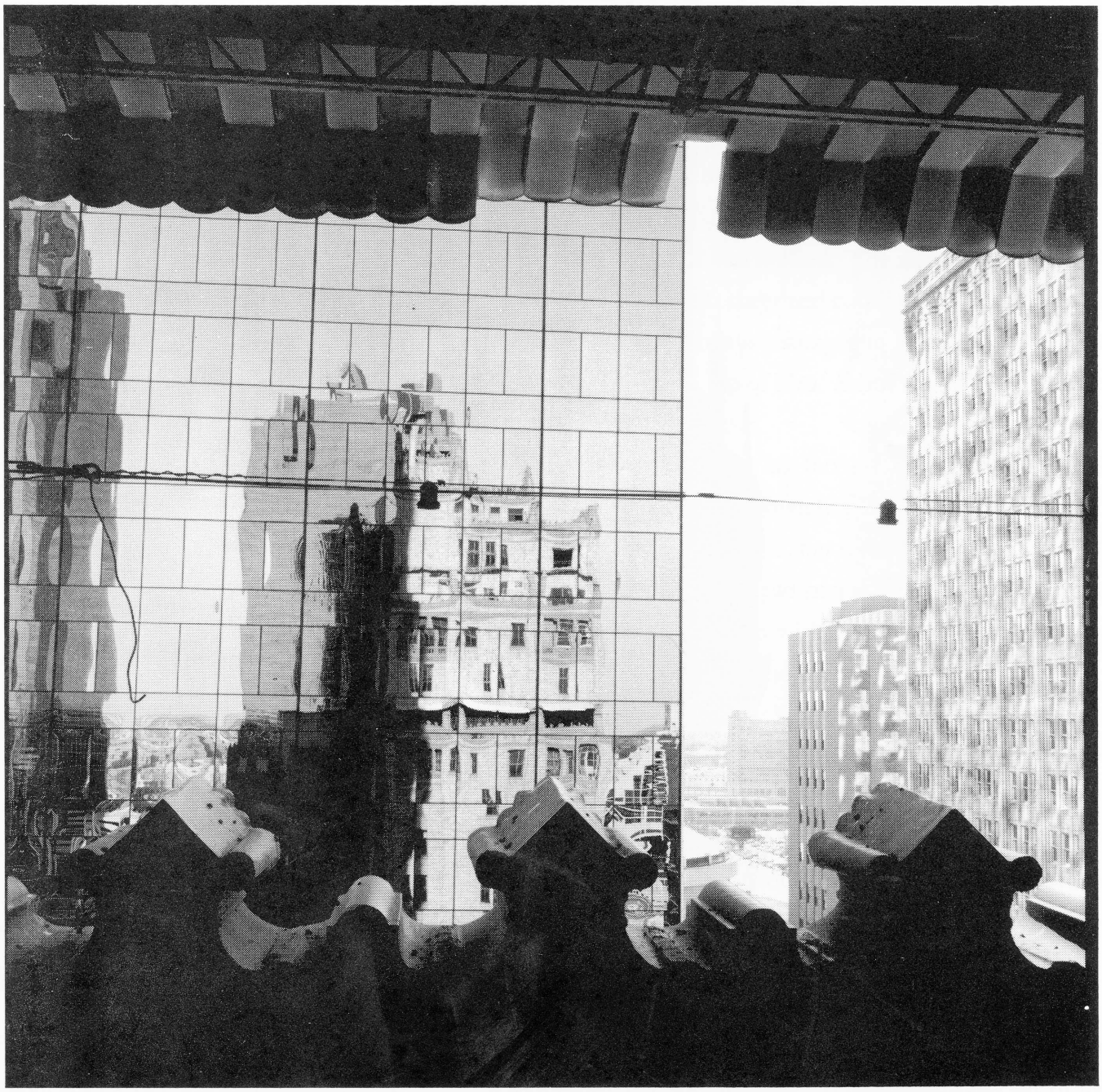
I have your mind
Engaged
I have your emotions
struggling to get out
I tap at your heart
With a chisel of words.



Eric Colbath

voices echo
six feet above
the tile
and I am not
there
I just drift
through
with the rest
of the cold ether
all of the millions of
worlds, and I
get one all
to myself
one tucked away safe and secure
from view,
and the words
float past
unnoticed





James Westerfield



Kim Ritzenthaler

Bill Monsees

Sleeping with Edith



Earlier, Edith had slid open the bedroom window to let in the first night air since spring. The calls of fall were in the air—a cool sky, the crisp half-moon, and a pleasantly warm breeze. "Good sleeping weather," John had proclaimed. "Good dreaming weather," Edith had replied. The moon spread twilight through the room; the radio/alarm tinged the white with blue. With sheet and comforter pulled to his neck, John lay sprawled on his back, gently snoring. Somehow, John always managed to attract all of the covers. On their own, they wriggled under, wrapped around, and piled on top of him. Edith slept curled up next to this insulated furnace; he was her breezebreak, heating pad, and pillow

Suddenly, Edith sat bolt upright in bed. She threw her hands to her face—fingertips on her forehead, palms on her cheeks. Slowly she pulled them down her face, dragged down her jaw, gasped in a breath, her body trembled. Her hands came to rest on her chest, palms on her breasts, her mouth still side open. She let out her gasp; her head fell onto her chin, her body still quivered. Her head snapped back up. She twisted to her left, into John. She came up on her knees, reached out—found John with her fingers. Her hands ran up his covered chest, onto his shoulders, and then down under the covers into his underarms. She dug her fingers in and started shaking him. And almost screamed, "John, John. Wake up. Wake up. I've had a dream. Oh my God! It was terrible, John. I was old! Wrinkled and grey I was old! Oh, John. Wake up. Wake up!"

He threw up his arms, grabbed the ends of his pillow with both hands, jerked out of Edith's grip, rolled over onto his left side, pulled the pillow down onto the right side of his head, and held it down with his forearm. "Go to sleep, Edith!" "Oh, good. You're awake!" "My mistake, Edith. Go back to sleep—please?" "I wasn't asleep, John, I wasn't. That's what I'm trying to tell you. I was dreaming. It was horrid. I'll never go to sleep again. I was old. I left the car parked in the front. Later, I went out back and couldn't find the car I forgot that I had parked it out front. I couldn't call you, John, I couldn't remember your office number I called the police, but they never came. I was scared. There wasn't any gas in the car What if that made the car thief mad, and then he came back to get me? And, the police never came "

From under his pillow, now fully awake, John cut her short. "Edith, you've forgotten where you've parked the car before. You've called the police for that reason twice this year Can you blame them for not coming? Don't worry Go to sleep." "See, John. It is coming true. I am getting old and forgetful. I'm

getting what's-his-name's disease. It's happening. I'm losing my memory "

"Edith! You never had a memory It's nothing new Don't worry about it. Go back to sleep " "I can't, John. Not ever I was turning 40." "Edith, you are 40!" "See, John, see. It's a prophesy Dreams are prophetic. They are, John. I read that. I remember I remember reading that, John." "Okay, okay, Edith. Dreams are prophetic, I believe you. Now, please, please let me go back to sleep." John pulled the pillow tight down onto his head.

Edith released her grip from the pillow and rocked back and away from John. She was still on her knees, her butt on her calves, her back erect. The moonlight shimmered on John's back, on the pillow over his head, and on across the bed. Edith fell onto his back, burying her face into the pillow sobbing. "John, will I forget you, the kids, their names, even their faces?" John twisted his neck, his shoulders, then twisted again. his shoulders, his back. Edith suffocated him. He gasped for a breath, pivoting his hips. He twisted again, hard, swinging his legs so that he turned onto his back, facing Edith. The pillow pressed on his chest, Edith on the pillow looking down into his face, moonlight bathing them both. John pulled her tight, sliding his palms down her sides and his fingertips up her back. Edith smiled. Blue light, pale white light caught the tears trailing down her cheeks, down the side of his neck, making a puddle on the sheet. Still gazing down at him, she managed a big, full-bodied smile. Almost laughing she poked him, "You get the wet spot now " Then, softly, "John?" "Sleep, Edith. Let's go back to sleep. You only had a bad dream."'"John," she persisted, "how do you know that this isn't a dream right now, this minute? Maybe we're dreaming this." John pulled up his left leg, curled his right in, twisted to his right, turned, and eazed Edith over and off of him and onto her back. He sat up, pulled the cover up onto her, leaned over and lightly kissed her on the cheek. "Pinch yourself, Edith. If you wake up, this is a dream; if not, go back to sleep." "Can I pinch you, John?" "It's your dream, Edith. Good night." John slid down into the covers next to her and nuzzled into her neck.

Suddenly, she sat bolt upright again. "John. It was horrid dream. You were in it, too. You were impotent." John jumped out of bed, grabbed his pillow on his move up, and ran for the door

Edith pulled the comforter up, settled herself back onto the bed, and turned toward the breeze. The moon lit up her smile and the big pearl tears that wandered down her cheeks.

Priscilla Eschbach

Murphy's Slaw

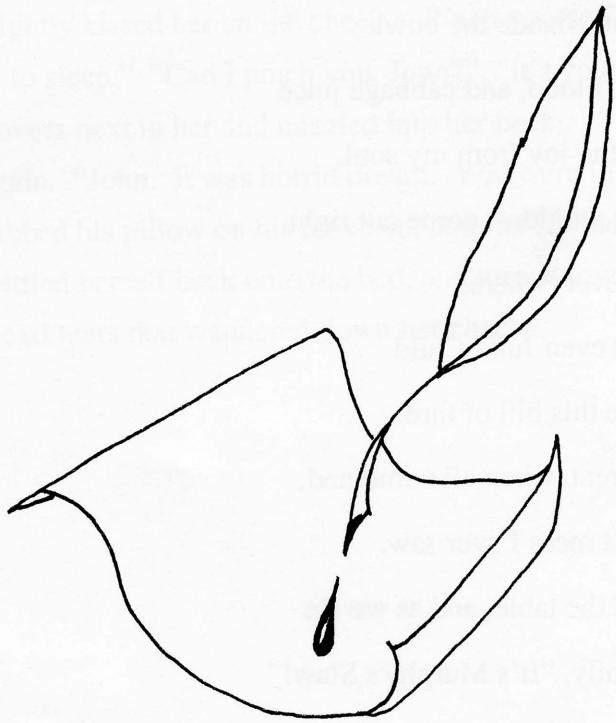
A man named Murphy said one day
"Whatever can go wrong, will."
I thought that a very negative way
to look at life until.
I went to make a special dish
for my extra special spouse
to make his appetite feverish
when he walked into the house
The grater on the carrots made
a softly, rhythmic, swish
as I scraped off the tip of my finger
and watched blood drip into the dish.
The cabbage, a little less than fresh,
turned to mush inside the bowl.
Now carrots, blood, and cabbage juice
were taking the joy from my soul.
The dressing wouldn't come out right,
lumps were everywhere.
I'm sure that even Julia Child
couldn't save this bill of fare.
My special treat, when all combined,
was the worst mess I ever saw
But it graced the table, and as we ate
I told the family, "It's Murphy's Slaw!"

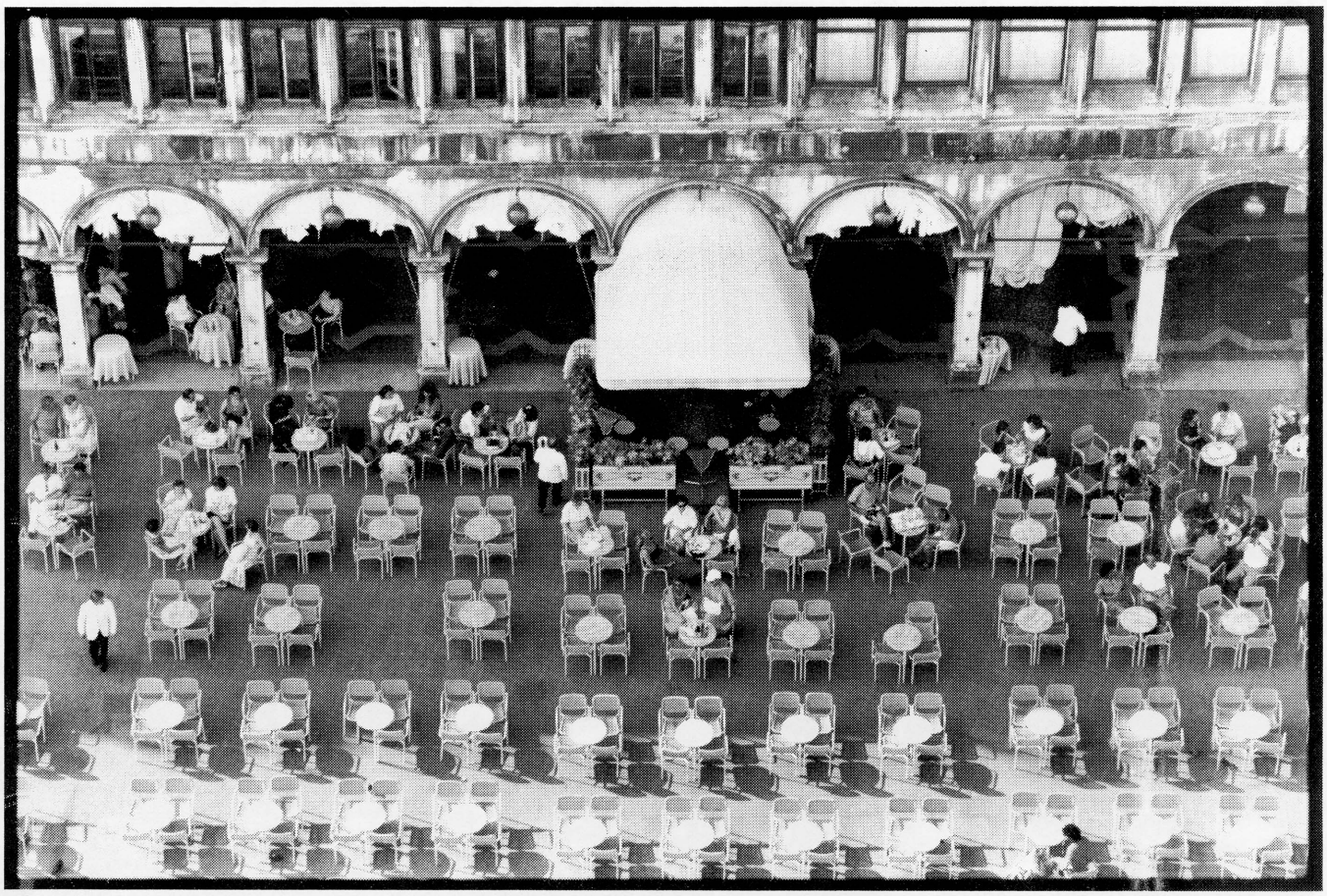


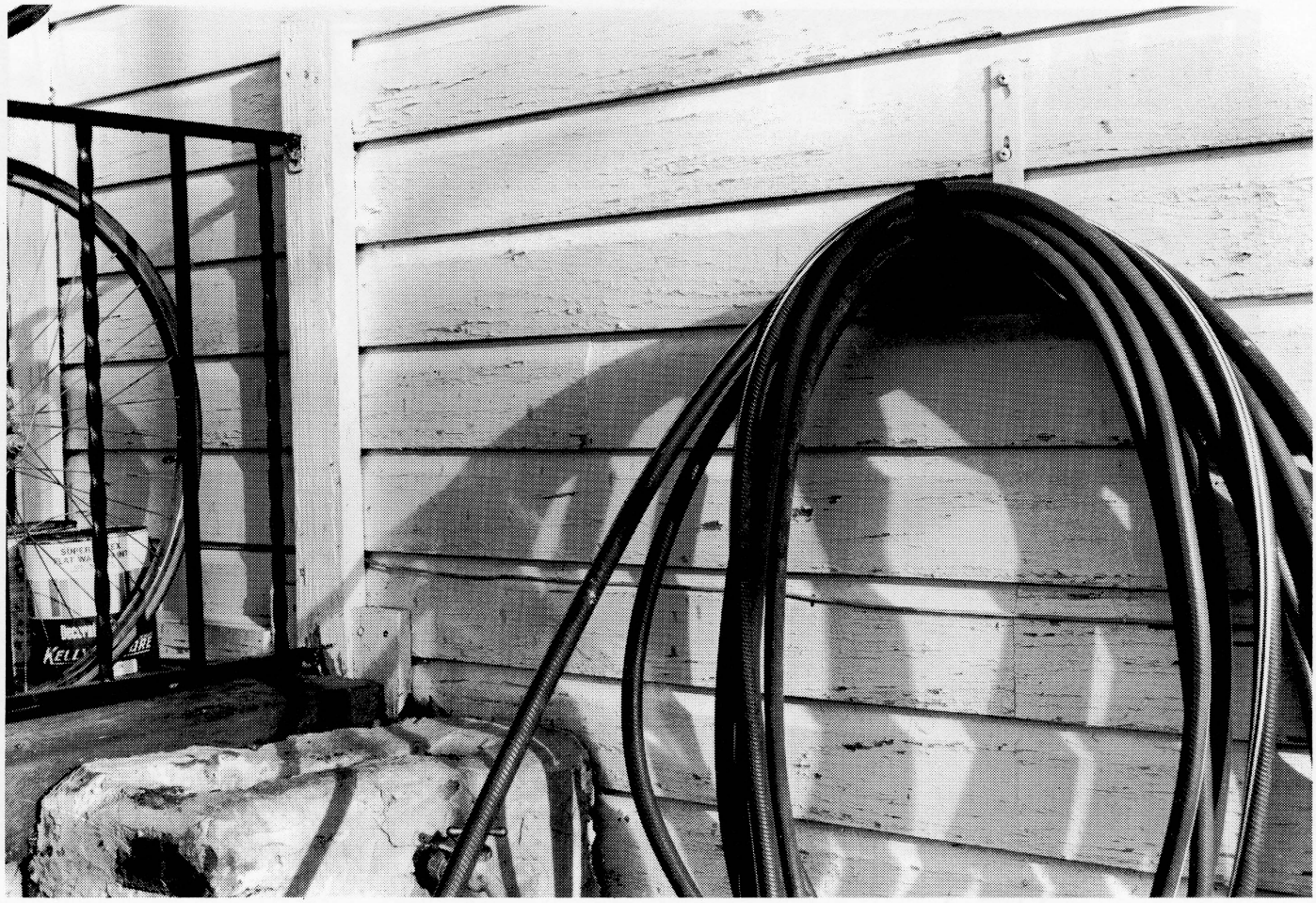
John E. Staples

A POEM OF A POEM

I wrote a poem of a poem
Which went a little like this
A poem of love is a poem of greatness
So a poem of death is a poem of mortal destiny
And a poem of a poem is so forth great
So you must keep up to understand
For a poem of a poem is very fast
And the longer the poem the faster it goes
So this poem of a poem must therefore be as fast as fast
And much faster than that fast
But you must keep up, for I may lose you
And so there you might not understand
Thus, all this reading would not be necessary
And a poem of any poem would be not so great!







Holly Powell

Mary Jean Henke

A Tunnel's Light

Enclosed from every direction except straight ahead, she huddled in the dark, man-made escape tunnel beneath the theater's stage. Hugging her knees close against her pounding chest, she shivered as the trickle of a single tear left its mark in her heavy makeup. Ready to explode, yet empty inside, confused emotions danced nervously from sob to sob, unable to find their place. Aside from her uneven, choppy breathing, it was silent. The rest of the dancers and crew had gone home, for it was late and time to rest. She was a dancer, but it was not time for her to go. Most of all, she had nowhere to go. She was a lost soul playing the part of a likable, energetic entertainer; a stereotyped "happy, successful performer" who secretly slipped this stereotype on and off like a mask. She pondered who she was, unable to grasp the answer One fact, however, which she indeed knew was that this dark, restricting tunnel under the stage would be her bed for the night. This cold, tight crypt, only high enough to crawl, and only wide enough to cough would serve as home until dawn.

Satisfied with her decision, her thoughts raced back to her evening's performance. It was a symbolic yet demented drama— avant-garde at its finest.

Center stage she balances with ease a difficult, uncentered position, as the intense heat of the spotlight glitters on beads of sweat across her skin. Feeling as one with the low-key lethargic music, her body pours from each controlled movement as the audience gazes, entranced. Cradling their applause within her frail and graceful arms, she gladly accepts their love, their

Oh, the stage is deceitful if you do not know who you are! With a blink she was crouched once again in the confined tunnel, soon forgetting her daydream of the evening's show She began to notice a numbness in her legs, but refused to recognize it. Examining more closely her surroundings, she softly ran her fingertips along the securely constructed wooden sides and ceiling of her dark cave, realizing they were splintered. She frequently stumbled across a sharp nail protruding in from the outside. Ironically, she was not threatened, but sensed a security about her confined aloneness.

She lived her life the same way— alone. Always choosing routes which separated herself from others, she felt terrible pain, but was afraid to open the doors. An incredibly strong person was chained to an awesome, weak spirit. Desperately, she sought to find herself, yet did not know where to look. Perhaps here she would discover the answer to weave a magical cure over the dark, impending shadow hanging upon her soul.

In everyone else's eyes she was a pillar— a free spirit— a talented dancer in the arts. She was one to depend on— to put the pressure on— to respect— to give the lead to. She was expected to be behind the driver's wheel, at the head of the race, Why, then, did she feel lost?

Her thoughts dashed once again to the performance that night.

It is the final scene of the show— a sad, thoughtful scene In the script, the dancers are to act as if they will never see each other again, and they hold a staged going away party. Amidst the punch and gala, the melancholy is unavoidable. The dancers each take a colorful balloon with a string attached. Stumped for the perfect words, they nervously swing their lifeless balloons from their strings and watch, with glazed eyes, the soft bounces as the balloons sink tiredly to the floor One dancer approaches another and soon all join arms in a circle harnessing one last moment together One by one they toss their lifeless balloons out of the circle and rejoin arms. Finally, when the star dancer raises her arm to toss her balloon to the floor, it floats, rather, and soars slowly up, out of the circle All of the surprised dancers watching, their eyes following the floating free spirit until it is out of sight— and the curtain closes.

She, this huddled human mass— she, this pitifully depressed person, was the star dancer that night who brought a symbolic ray of hope to the audience with her floating balloon. Clenching her fists with frustration, she felt infuriated with the other cast members for not reaching out to her and befriending her How could they? They idolized her too much to be close to her, and she hated them for that.

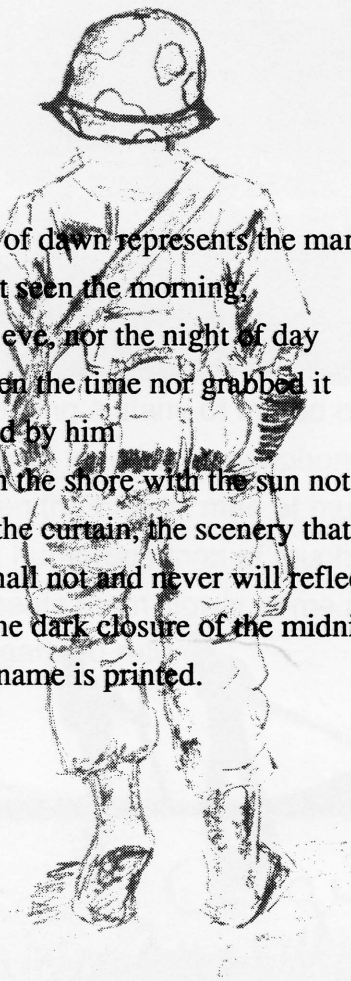
She felt an eternity pass while curled in her little ball under the stage. The night was no longer young— it was late— bewitching hour late. The numbness in her legs could not be ignored. Releasing her arms from their clenched state around her legs, she stretched them forward, towards the opening of the tunnel. Still not allowing herself to leave this place, she lay down and decided to sleep. Feeling exhausted and unable to cry another tear— she fell into a deep unconsciousness.

Dreams of peace and relaxation embraced her For once in a very long time, a warm sensation of friendship swept over her Unsure of whose friendship, she searched deeper to find a dim light shining at the end of the tunnel in which she hid. No longer dark, the light grew and filled the coffin-like place with a glowing brightness. She dreamt of floating towards this light— accepting its warmth just as she had accepted the warmth of her beloved audience. Leaving her body behind in the tunnel, her soul danced with the bright light that tickled her She dreamt of not pausing to look back, but focusing forward with an unbearable desire.

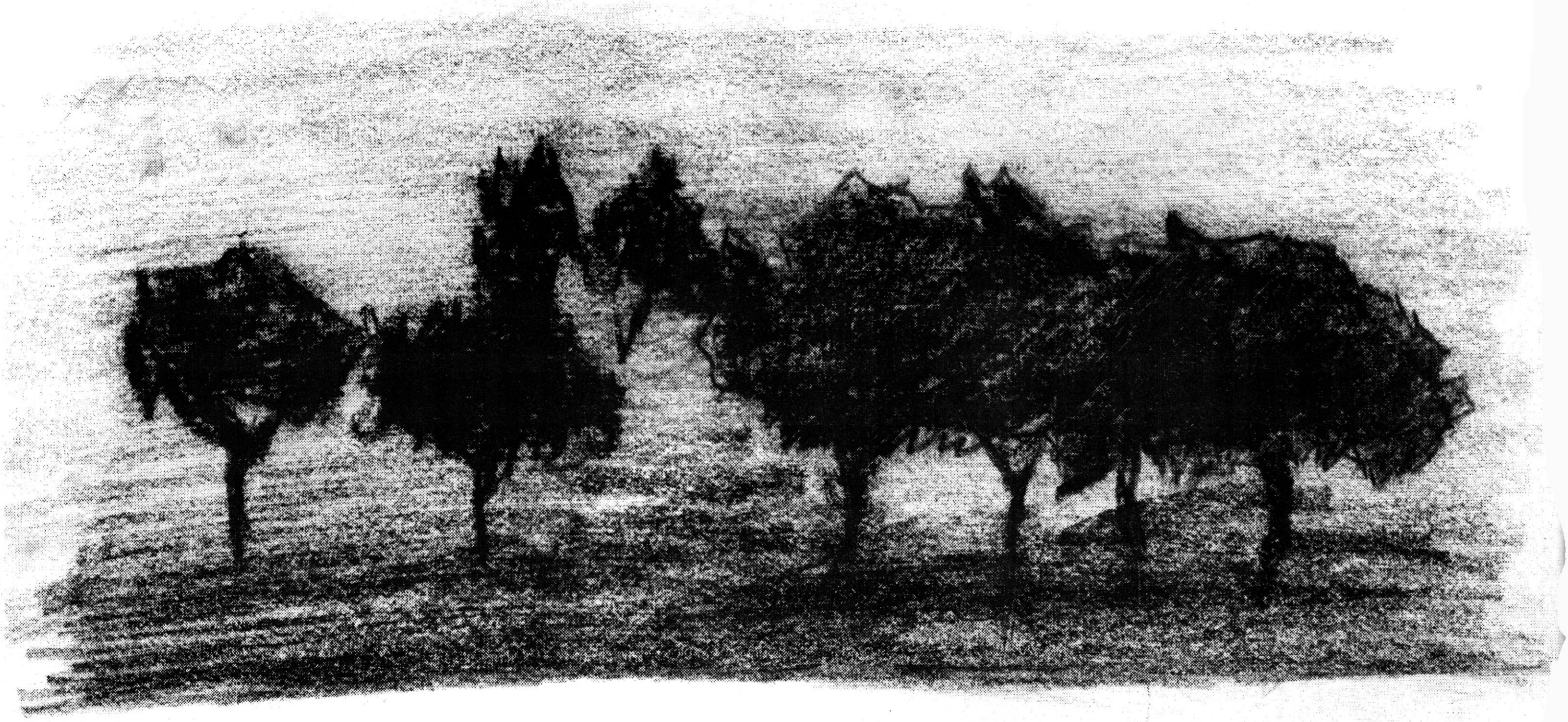
Morning light soon arose and the doors to the theater snapped open with a click. A hush of voices sounded low and then grew into regular conversations as the dancers and stage crew entered the theater for practice. There was a concerned question in the air of where the star dancer was and why she was late. One young man from the stage crew checked the props and hidden tunnel as routine before practice. Casually opening the trapdoor, he paused, wide-eyed, then yelled for others to come. The dancers circled around the trapdoor— only this time their focus was not up at a floating balloon, but down below There she lay, sickly Her graceful arms were stiff and cold beside her statuesque frame, The beautiful olive skin that covered her body with a warm glow now appeared corpse white and aged. Horrified, the dancers wept over the suffocated body that she left behind in her tunnel, unknowing of the soul that was set free to the light at the other end.

John E. Staples

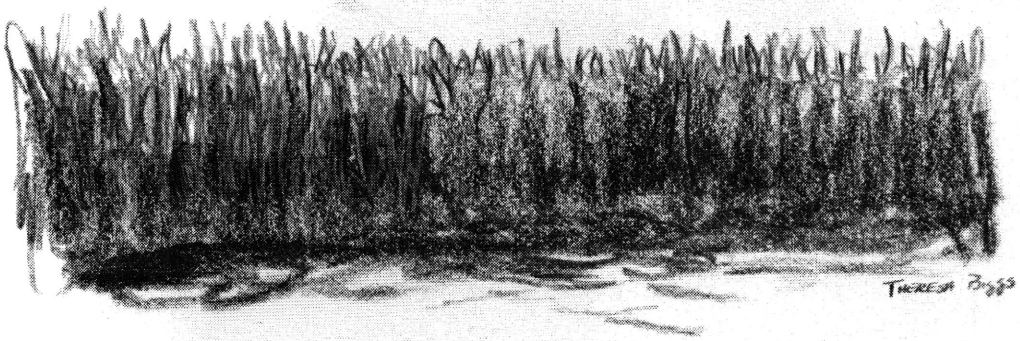
A Stone



The captivity of dawn represents the man
For he has not seen the morning,
Nor the noon eve, nor the night of day
He has not seen the time nor grabbed it
when it moved by him
He just sits on the shore with the sun not yet up
Never to see the curtain, the scenery that comes up next
For the sun shall not and never will reflect off him and
his life, just the dark closure of the midnight graveyard
For there his name is printed.



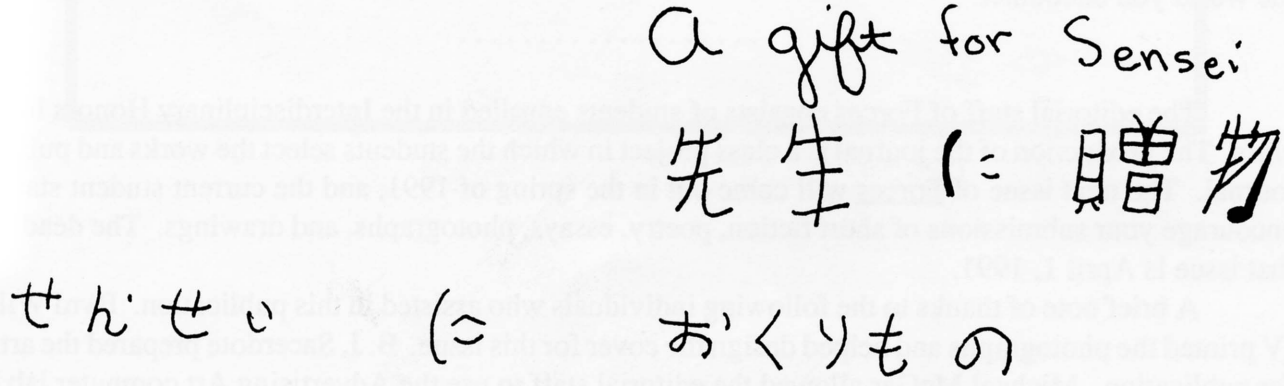



THERESA BIGGS

Kathleen Clary Edwards

An Original Composition for a Language Not My Own:

A patient man of much humor
A humorous man of much patience
Sits beside me and listens
with a sigh, as the words skitter
beyond my sight and into his
Mumbled incohesions slip from
my lips . . . stopping long enough
to rear their legs
majestically, touching noses softly,
begging of beauty in my mind's eye,
sounding a litany of muted chorus,
rubbing together a symphony of hallelujah
When the patient man of much humor
The humorous man of much patience
Repeats them slowly to me and praises
my garbled return.



Peggy Brown

Editorial

Gertrude rubs against me, alternately clawing the carpet and my leg. She digs her claws into my thigh, first right paw, then left, the way kittens pad their mothers as they nurse. I try to endure her affectionate clawing, smile as she reaches up and paws my arm to interrupt my work on the keyboard. I stroke her, a gesture that sends Gertrude over to rub against the computer paper jutting out of my trash can. She eyes me with each nose-to-tail stretch against the trash. She ignores the stale pretzels among the papers in favor of the odor that she catches as I take off my boot. First she rubs on the boot, burying her nose in the sheath. Then she rolls on it, pawing at my suspended foot with each roll. Finally she leaves the boot to roll on my foot. My tolerance ends when she bites my toe. I put on my boot and go back to work at the computer.

As I describe what I see, I necessarily transform that visual language (what I see the cat do) to a verbal language (the words that I choose to communicate my vision).

Such a description distorts and omits. You couldn't know, for example, that Gertrude usually hates petting and melts away from my hand each time I try to stroke her back. You also couldn't know that she is in heat and just spent a day alone in the upstairs study. And much more that I see in her that I can't include in a written monologue of her actions. Thus to describe her tells only part of the story. I create a situation with a reality of its own designed by the words I choose; I can't report precisely an event that I see. My writing interprets. Your reading also interprets. You must re-visualize what I see if we are to communicate at all.

This edition of Forces seeks to explore the possible meanings that can emerge when we combine visual and verbal language. Theresa Biggs, co-editor of this edition, has taken the written works in this journal and created a visual language to accompany each selection. Her response is not an illustration but a creation—a visualization of her interpretive response to the written event. Here she reverses the process with which I began this editorial. I respond verbally to a visual act; Theresa responds visually to a verbal act. By combining the two forms of language, visual and verbal, we hope to introduce you to the multiple possible meanings available in each work. If we are successful in luring you to see that multiple readings exist, particularly as they are evoked by a visual interpretive response, then you may read the works as an invitation to create your own visual response to these and other works you read and to the raw material of the world you encounter.

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The editorial staff of Forces consists of students enrolled in the Interdisciplinary Honors literature class. The production of the journal is a class project in which the students select the works and publish the journal. The next issue of Forces will come out in the spring of 1991, and the current student staff and I encourage your submissions of short fiction, poetry, essays, photographs, and drawings. The deadline for that issue is April 1, 1991.

A brief note of thanks to the following individuals who assisted in this publication. Byrd Williams IV printed the photographs and helped design the cover for this issue. B. J. Sacerdote prepared the art work for publication. Michael McGar allowed the editorial staff to use the Advertising Art computer lab in the preparation of the journal. Cathy Holt, Rex Reese, and Byrd Williams helped locate visual works to be included in this publication. Finally, I want to thank Dean Mitchell Smith and the English faculty for their continued support of the journal.

Pithy Notes on Contributors

Theresa Biggs, student, draws life into art. **Matthew K. Brown,** student, takes the ordinary situations of life and creates the extraordinary. **Susan Clasby,** student, documents the sub, suburban. **Eric Colbath,** student, plays words and images to inspire thought. **Betty Correll,** adjunct English professor, allows the medium of poetry to paint a swirling portrait of movement. **Kathleen Clary Edwards,** student, proves the universality of art through language in her poetry. **Priscilla Eschbach,** student, peppers her poetry with humor. **Mary Jean Henke,** student, offers us a glimpse of the darker side of ourselves. **Kay Gontarek,** student, allows her muse to inspire the most lovely of fantasies. **Diane King,** student, confuses line and shadow in a created grey world. **Bill Monsees,** student, expresses his love for language in fiction, poetry, and thoughtful essays. **Violet O'Brien,** student, lyrically translates the experiences that her life offers. **Holly Powell,** student, abstracts the down home for form. **Kim Ritzenthaler,** student, travels in black and white. **Janet Roberts,** student, peers through her lens and captures the unseen. **John E. Staples,** student, gently pricks our thoughts and emotions with the beauty of simple verse. **James W. Westerfield III,** photography lab technician, shows the artistic side of his love.

FORCES is published two times a year by the Interdisciplinary Honors Program of Collin County Community College District, 2800 E. Spring Creek Parkway, Plano, Texas 75074, or 1600 West University, McKinney, Texas 75070. *FORCES* welcomes all contributions of poetry, fiction, essays, black and white photography, and visual art from members of the CCCC community. All accepted manuscripts become the property of *FORCES*. Mailing subscriptions are $6 per year (regular) and $8 per year (institutions).
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